



# **U.S. Census Records, 1850–1940**

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## **Objectives**

- Define what census records are
- Explore information found in the records
- Explain the value of census records
- Identify how to use them
- Outline census availability

## **What is a Census?**

- A census is a count and description of the population of a country, state, county, or city
- Census lists are also called “schedules”
- United States censuses are legislated by congress for the purpose of representation

## **About the Census**

- The United States Government takes a census every 10 years on the zero year of each decade—started in 1790
- A census taker goes from door to door, house to house, and farm to farm

## **Value of Census Records**

A well-indexed and imaged census is one of the easiest ways to locate where an ancestor lived and when they lived there

- Census records tend to be available
- The family can be followed over time
- They answer genealogy questions: names, relationships, dates, and places
- Used together, censuses build a strong case and pedigree
- Indicate migration patterns by the birth dates and places
- Locate extended family and learn who the neighbors are
- Lead to other records: immigration, land and property, military, vital, and more

## **Using Census Records—What You Should Know Before Using a Census**

- Decide which person or family you are looking for
- Identify where the person or family is living in a specific time period

## **How to Use the Census**

- Search online databases for the selected year, location, and name

- Find the family on the population schedule, for every census year in which they lived
- Review and analyze what you find
- Compare the evidence with other known/established facts about the family

## Content of Federal Censuses

### Major Census Groups

- 1790–1840—Each line describes an entire household. It only names the head of household with age category of male and female
  - In 1812 the British Army destroyed parts of the 1790, 1800, and 1810 census
- 1850–1940—Head of household and every name
- 1950–2010—Not yet available

### 1850–1940 Census

- More information is given for each member of the household
- Each person has their own line on the form, more information is available per person
- The 1890 Census was destroyed by fire. Only part of the veterans schedule exists—very little population schedule

### Uses for 1850–1940 Censuses

- Locate ancestors over time (10-year snapshot)
- Provide names and approximate birth years
- Determine relationships, number of children
- Identify who is living in the household and who is not
- Provides occupation, economic status, means of support, education, and medical condition

### Census contents 1850–1940

Data	1850	1860	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940
Name of each person	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dwelling Number, Family Number, Enumeration District	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Post office address		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Street addresses (in cities)				✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Age at last birthday	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Gender and race	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Marital Status				✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Relationship to Head				✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Occupation	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Real property \$	✓	✓	✓						✓	
Personal property \$		✓	✓							
Place of birth	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Place of parent's birth				✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	

Immigration						✓	✓	✓	✓	
If farm/home owned/rented						✓	✓	✓	✓	
Citizenship						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

### Numbers on Census Schedules

- House number (address)
- Household number (in that census)
- Enumeration District (Census district number)
- Sheet number (sheet number in that Enumeration District)
- Page number (page in that census may be handwritten or printed)

### Census Indexes and Images

Online:

FamilySearch.org—free

Ancestry.com—Subscription

findmypast.com—Subscription

censusrecords.com

### Types of Census Schedules

taken

Legend: ✓ = The schedule exists and is available

■ = Some parts are missing or destroyed

	1790	1800	1810	1820	1830	1840	1850	1860	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940
Population	■	■	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	■	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mortality							■	■	■	■						
Veterans						✓					■					
Agriculture						■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■			
Manufacture			■	■		■	■	■	■	■						
Slave							✓	✓								
Social Statistics							■	■	■	■						

Mortality schedules list person who died during the 12 months before the census was taken

### Cautions in Using Census Records

- Handwriting—legibility
- Head of household may change
- Abbreviations: names and initials, locality, relationship, and occupations
- Incorrect information—who was the informant? (an adult, child, or neighbor)
- Incomplete

## Availability of Census Records—Online/films

### FamilySearch.org

A free site

### Ancestry.com

A subscription site that contains indexes and images of the population and some other schedules

### findmypast.com

A subscription site that contains indexes and images of population schedules

### Archives.gov

National Archives Record Administration. They house the original census records.

This site has a genealogy section that discusses census records

### Census.gov

U.S. Census Bureau. This site does not have specific information about census records 1790 to 1930, because that information is at the National Archives. This site has contemporary, statistical, and geographic information about the census

## Census Records are Critical

- Census records will help you find your family within the United States
- The records will lead you to vital records, land records, immigration, military, and other records that can further your research
- You can and will have success in searching census records!

## Reference Aids

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